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COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Possible common themes for the follow-up of major international conferences during the coordination segment of the substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its agreed conclusions 1995/1 (A/50/3, chap. III, para. 22), the Economic and Social Council invited the Secretary-General, taking into account the suggestions made in paragraph 57 of his report on coordinated follow-up to major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields (E/1995/86) and based on the work of relevant subsidiary bodies and through consultations with Member States, relevant organs of the United Nations system and specialized agencies, to offer suggestions for possible common themes for follow-up of major international conferences for consideration and decision by the Council during its coordination segment.

I. PROPOSALS BY MEMBER STATES

2. The Secretary-General consulted Member States through a note verbale dated 29 May 1996, as a result of which he received written proposals from Belarus, Italy (on behalf of the States Members of the European Union), Japan, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

3. Belarus proposed the theme "Role of regional and subregional organizations in the integrated implementation of programmes and plans of action based on results of the global conferences in the economic, social and related fields connected with sustainable development".

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4. Italy, on behalf of the States Members of the European Union, proposed the theme "Mainstreaming of the gender perspective within the United Nations system" and, as a sectoral second theme, "Freshwater".

5. Japan suggested that education or health or gender could be considered as a possible common theme for the 1997 coordination segment of the Council.

6. The Russian Federation proposed the theme "A stable macroeconomic policy framework conducive to development".

7. Ukraine proposed the following themes: "A stable macroeconomic policy framework conducive to development"; "International trade and commodities" and "Participation, democracy, human rights, accountability and partnership with major groups and non-governmental organizations".

II. PROPOSALS BY ORGANS, ORGANIZATIONS AND BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

8. The Secretary-General consulted the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system through a letter dated 22 May 1996, as a result of which he received the following proposals for themes:

(a) Gender equality and the empowerment of women;

(b) External debt and financing for development;

(c) Partnership with major groups and non-governmental organizations;

(d) Governance and human rights;

(e) Emergency relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and the resumption of economic and social development;

(f) Coordinated capacity-building at the country level and for coordinated follow-up to conferences;

(g) Coordination of policies for cross-cutting themes of United Nations Conferences: global and country level;

(h) Poverty alleviation with a particular focus on food security;

(i) Basic social services;

(j) Employment and sustainable livelihoods;

(k) An enabling environment for economic and social development;

(l) Africa and special categories;

(m) Implementation of the plan of action emerging from the World Food Summit.

III. PROPOSALS BY INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES

9. It may be recalled that the Council was requested by the Fourth World Conference on Women to consider devoting at least one coordination segment before the year 2000 to coordination of the advancement of women based on the revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women; one high-level segment and one operational activities segment were also to be devoted to the advancement of women. 1/ The General Assembly subsequently invited the Council to consider devoting one high-level segment, one coordination segment and one operational segment, before the year 2000, to the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Assembly resolution 50/203, para. 23).

10. The Commission on Human Rights, at its fifty-second session, held in 1996, recommended that the Economic and Social Council consider devoting the coordination segment of its substantive session of 1998 to the question of the coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action as part of the review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, to be carried out in 1998.

IV. SUGGESTED THEMES

11. In paragraph 128 of the report of the Secretary-General on the coordination of United Nations system activities for poverty eradication (E/1996/61), it is stated that, for the Council to play its oversight and coordinating role effectively, it would seem necessary that it decide to work on the basis of a multi-year programme of work, as is increasingly the case of its functional commissions; this would also entail close consultations between the Bureau of the Council and the chairpersons of the functional commissions, as also foreseen by the Council in agreed conclusions 1995/1 of its coordination segment of 1995.

12. In selecting a theme for its coordination segment, the Council should take the following factors into account:

(a) The theme should be a major cross-cutting outcome of several international conferences in the economic, social or related fields;

(b) The theme should be a subject of operational relevance to a number of organizations of the system and/or a subject in respect of which several functional commissions have been active;

(c) The theme should have a significant policy dimension, so as to maximize the benefit that could be derived from the presence of heads of agencies, funds, programmes and other bodies of the United Nations system during the discussions;

(d) The discussion of the theme by the Council and the agreed conclusions on the theme should contribute to enhanced coordination of policies and activities by the United Nations system.

13. In paragraph 57 of the report of the Secretary-General on coordinated follow-up to major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields (E/1995/86), the common themes emanating from those conferences were identified as follows:

(a) A stable macroeconomic policy framework conducive to development;

(b) External debt and finance for development;

(c) International trade and commodities;

(d) Science and technology;

(e) Eradication of poverty and hunger;

(f) Access to productive occupational opportunities, full employment and family incomes;

(g) Gender equality, equity and empowerment of women;

(h) Basic social services for all: primary health care, nutrition, education, safe water and sanitation, population and shelter;

(i) Promoting social integration;

(j) Environment and natural resources;

(k) Africa and special categories;

(l) Participation, democracy, human rights, accountability and partnership with major groups and non-governmental organizations.

14. These themes provide a sufficiently broad field from which the Council could identify themes for its own multi-year work programme for the coordination segment as it relates to the follow-up to conferences. In doing so, the Council will also need to take into account the multi-year work programmes of the functional commissions.

15. The 12 themes identified above can be examined and placed in one of two categories. First, themes that span the mandates of several functional commissions and can be directly examined during the Council's coordination segment. Secondly, themes that are covered to a large extent by a single functional commission and can be examined initially by that commission. A good example of the first category is the theme of poverty eradication discussed during the coordination segment of the present session. As mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on the coordination of United Nations system activities for poverty eradication (E/1996/61), this theme cuts across the mandate of a number of functional commissions. In such themes the advantages of discussion by the Council are apparent. With respect to the second category of theme, the functional commissions can themselves take on a greater coordination role, reporting to the Council on matters that require its decision. A pertinent example is the theme of environment and natural resources: the

Commission on Sustainable Development can continue its overall monitoring of Agenda 21 and its task of ensuring that environmental concerns are mainstreamed in the work of other functional commissions.

16. In the report of the Secretary-General on the coordination of United Nations system activities for poverty eradication (E/1996/61), it is proposed that the Council consider selecting for its coordination segment a suitable theme related to an enabling environment for development, which could be considered in 1997; further, the theme of poverty is proposed for consideration by the Council during the coordination segment of its substantive session of 2000.

17. Other themes which the Council could consider for its coordination segment include (a) Gender equality and the empowerment of women; (b) Participation, democracy, human rights, accountability and partnership with major groups and non-governmental organizations; and (c) Africa and special categories. With respect to theme (a), it may be noted that "mainstreaming the gender perspective in the activities of the United Nations system relating to poverty eradication" was considered as a sub-theme during the coordination segment of the present session. Since the Commission on the Status of Women will undertake the mid-term review of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women in 1998, the Council could consider devoting its 1998 coordination segment to mainstreaming the gender perspective in the activities of the United Nations system. With respect to theme (b), the Commission for Social Development is to consider the theme, "Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons" in 1998. It would therefore be appropriate for the theme of "participation" to be discussed by the Council in 1999. As regards theme (c), since the Council discussed the development of Africa at its substantive session of 1995, it could consider conducting an overall review of the commitments made by international conferences in favour of Africa in 2002, when the General Assembly is to conduct the final review and assessment of the New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

18. Taking into account all the above considerations, the views expressed by Member States and the proposals made by the organizations of the United Nations system, and in the light of the need for a multi-year programme of work, the following themes, together with the years in which they could be considered, are suggested as part of a multi-year programme of work of the Council:

	Theme	Year
1.	A theme related to the national and international economic environment, for example: - Promotion of a stable macroeconomic policy framework - External debt and finance for development	1997
2.	Mainstreaming the gender perspective in the activities of the United Nations system	1998
3.	A theme related to participation, democratization, human rights and non-governmental organizations	1999
4.	Eradication of poverty and hunger	2000

19. It may be recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/162, provided for the coordination segment to deal with one or more themes. In resolution 50/227, the Assembly also gives the Council the possibility of choosing, at its organizational session, a second theme dealing with concrete sectoral issues. It should be understood, therefore, that the adoption of a multi-year programme of work would not in any way preclude the possibility of the Council selecting, if it so decides, for any given year, an additional theme of a sectoral character.

Notes

1/ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paras. 313-315.